

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, SA
SUBJECT: EXPATRIATE LABOR PROBLEMS IN THE EASTERN PROVINCE

1. FEBRUARY WAS NOT A GOOD MONTH FOR EXPATRIATE LABOR RELATIONS IN THE EASTERN PROVINCE. ABOUT 400 THAIS AND PHILIPPINO LABORERS BRAWLED OVER AN ALLEGED RACIAL SLUR, AND ABOUT 10 WORKERS WERE THROWN IN JAIL. INDIAN AND PAKISTANI LABORERS WORKING FOR A BRITISH CATERING FIRM REFUSED TO WORK OVERTIME, THUS EXACERBATING WORKING CONDITIONS AT A CONSTRUCTION CAMP IN SHEDGUM, AND OTHER PAKISTANI AND INDIAN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS BEGAN A SLOW-DOWN. SOME 900 TURKISH LABORERS STAGED A STRIKE OVER DIFFERENCES WITH A TURKISH SUPERVISOR, AND THE AMERICAN CONSTRUCTING FIRM CALLED IN ARAMCO AUTHORITIES TO HELP SETTLE THE DISPUTE.

2. MOST SERIOUS OF THE INCIDENTS INVOLVING EXPATRIATE WORKERS WAS THE THAI/PHILIPPINO DISPUTE IN WHICH TWO WORKERS WERE HOSPITALIZED AND THEN PUT IN JAIL BY THE SAUDI POLICE. CAUSES OF THE MELEE ARE
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UNCLEAR,1(END ACCORDING TO BECK AND FLUOR REPS, FIGHT WAS PROBABLY RESULT OF RACIAL SLUR BY WORKERS FROM EITHER NATIONALITY. OTHER CAUSES CITED WERE DISPUTE OVER RESULTS OF SOCCER MATCH OR JUMPING FOOD LINES IN COMPANIES' MESS HALLS.

3. ALL 10 OF THE WORKERS INCARCERATED HAVE BEEN RELEASED FROM PRISON, BUT FLUOR HAS TERMINATED FOUR INDONESIANS WHO WERE IN

JAK AND SIX OTHERS CONSIDERED TO BE RING LEADERS. BECK IS TAKING NO ACTION AGAINST ITS SIX THAI EMPLOYEES WHO ARE NOW OUT OF PRISON.

4. IN SHEDGUM CONSTRUCTION CAMP, WHERE 8,000 WORKERS ARE EMPLOYED, DISPUTE OVER WORKING CONDITIONS AND PAY SCALES STILL CONTINUES. PAKISTANI AND INDIAN LABORERS OF U.K. CATERING FIRM GRANDMET HAVE REFUSED WORK OVERTIME AND HAVE STAGED SLOW-DOWN, THUS AGGRAVATING OTHER PAKISTANI AND INDIAN LABORERS FROM SAUDI CONSTRUCTION FIRM WHO THEN REFUSED WORK OVERTIME. AT LAST REPORT, SAUDI POLICE, ACTING ON INSTRUCTION FROM AL-HASA AMIRATE, WERE TO ARREST THE 14 RING LEADERS OF GRANDMET OPERATION AND REMAIN AT CAMP TO KEEP ORDER.

5. IN SHEDGUM AREA AT ANOTHER CONSTRUCTION CAMP, APPROXIMATELY 900 TURKISH LABORERS EMPLOYED BY FOSTER WHEELER STAGED SIT-DOWN STRIKE WHEN FOSTER WHEELER MANAGEMENT REFUSED TRANSFER TURKISH SUPERVISOR WITH WHOM WORKERS HAD GRIEVANCE. ARAMCO LABOR AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS PERSONNEL WERE CALLED IN TO HELP NEGOTIATE SETTLEMENT, AND TURKISH LABORERS RETURNED TO WORK.

6. COMMENT: ASUES OF THESE EXPATRIATE WORKER UNREST PROBLEMS VARY, BUT THERE ARE SOME BASICALLY UNHEALTHY SITUATIONS WHICH FOSTER THE UNREST: 1) LARGE NUMBERS OF DIVERSE NATIONAL GROUPS WORKING CLOSE TO EACH OTHER, 2) ISOLATION OF WORK CAMPS IN SAUDI DESERT, 3) BACHELOR STATUS OF LABORERS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WITHOUT ADEQUATE RECREATION FACILITIES, 4) LARGE DISPARITY BETWEEN FOREIGN LABORERS AND WESTERN PROFESSIONALS AND SAUDI EMPLOYEES IN PAY SCALES, HOUSING AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES, AND 5) CULTURAL SHOCK FOR WORKERS FROM NON-ARABIC COUNTRIES WORKING 10 TO 12 HOURS PER DAY, SIX OR SEVEN DAYS PER WEEK IN REMOTE AREA OF SAUDI ARABIA.

7. FURTHER DETAILS OF FEBRUARY LABOR UNREST FOLLOW BY AIRGRAM. BUSHENLL

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